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BISHOP OF HEREFORD's *Butler* *h*
C H A R G E *694. h 10*
TO THE *11*
C L E R G Y
OF HIS
D I O C E S E,
AT HIS *22*
PRIMARY VISITATION

IN J U N E, 1789.

PUBLISHED
At the REQUEST of the CLERGY.

HEREFORD:

Printed at the OFFICE in the HIGH-TOWN, for C. BADHAM, and
J. ALLEN, Hereford; and sold by J. FLETCHER, and Messrs. PRINCE
and COOKE, Oxford; and J. PAYNE, Mews-gate, London.

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C H A R G E

DELIVERED TO THE

C L E R G Y

OF THE

DIOCESE OF HEREFORD.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

S the principal design of Visitations
can be but imperfectly answered,
till I am better acquainted with
the state of the Diocese, from the Returns you
will be pleased to make to my Inquiries, I
must endeavour to be useful on the present
occasion upon general subjects, such as are

applicable to a Solemnity like this, without the aid of local Observations.

Having naturally no great prospect of meeting you again thus assembled, I could wish to comprehend within this hour the whole of ministerial Duty. I could wish to exhaust that treasure of Pastoral Advice, contained in the Epistles of St. Paul to Timothy and Titus. But as our time would not admit so large an undertaking, and it might only have the appearance of pressing upon you observations, which must occur to any attentive reader of those Epistles, I shall confine myself to the most conspicuous parts of our Public Duties, and trust, that what I shall offer will not be unacceptable to an assembly of worthy Clergymen.

I must suppose myself addressing such, unless the contrary were notorious, and shall therefore pass over general Exhortations to a Life and Character becoming Ministers of the Gospel. They are so perpetually obvious to a serious

serious mind, engaged in a course of ministerial studies and duty, that it would appear unnecessary at best, without some very loud call, to lay the Precepts of Religion and Morality before You, whose Profession it is to impress them upon others. It would even appear injurious to a body of Ministers of the Gospel, of any Denomination, to suppose them so grossly inconsistent, so lost to all sense of Decency, Reputation and Duty, as to be remarkable for counteracting their own Preaching.

The public Offices of reading Prayers and administering Sacraments, Preaching and Catechising, are prescribed to us with clear directions by the Rubric, which may be considered as part of the Law of the land, and which we are all engaged by a solemn Subscription to observe. But those directions are not so minute, as to extend to the manner of performing the Duties. That is, in great measure, left to the judgement of our understandings, or to the advice of

judicious friends, and to the disposition of our hearts.

We are directed, for instance, to read the Prayers distinctly, and with an audible voice; a very material direction so far as it goes. We doubtless read to little or no purpose, unless we are heard; and they who read naturally, as all judicious men do, or read attentively, as all good men do, need no farther direction, than to be loud and distinct. Here the Rubric stops.

Perhaps Affectation and Levity were not so prevailing two or three Centuries ago, as to insinuate themselves into the most serious employment of the human mind. But we, of the present age, have at times had occasion to observe, that Affectation may mislead a well-meaning Reader to overact the Prayers, to be needlessly emphatical, which is the more absurd, when the Emphasis is mistaken; to assume a vehement or pathetic manner, of use perhaps on other public occasions, but of

of no efficacy towards obtaining the end of Prayer, or supporting a spirit of true Piety in a Congregation.

Our forms of Prayer are superior to pretended Aids or Embellishments of this sort, being suited to a grave, humble, composed manner; and the good sense of the nation would, if the practice were general, be disgusted by an appearance of Vanity mixed with Devotion. When a declamatory mode of praying was most in vogue among the Enthusiasts of the last Century, their Prayers were adapted to it; and what was the Effect? Many who might have been better disposed, under better direction, were driven to avoid the detested imputation of Hypocrisy, by running into the other Extreme of avowed Impiety,

But still this Extravagance, unpleasing and suspicious as it is, may be the overflowing of a warm heart, very sincere, though very injudicious. There is another offence against propriety in public Worship, which may

may grow into Habit through Levity, or want of Attention to the Work we are engaged in: I mean, a thoughtless, hasty, irreverent delivery of Prayers to Almighty God, neither expressive of Piety in the Reader, nor fit to excite it in the Hearer; mischievous to a sad degree, when it offends good minds in the congregation, more so, when it creates Indifference in the rest.

These two Extremes, into which a well-disposed Reader may inadvertently be led, are so very unedifying at best, that the mention of them is sufficient to dissuade from the imitation of them; and I introduced them chiefly for the purpose of leading your thoughts to the comfortable Reflection, how much the Ministers of the established Church have it in their power to raise, confirm, and propagate a spirit of Piety in the nation, by the proper discharge of only this one part of their duty.

We

We are of equal consequence in Preaching; and there too the most natural manner is generally the most successful. Divine Truths have a power of their own, and will make an impression, though unsupported by the Arts of Eloquence. If the Preacher, in delivering the Meditations of his own mind upon them, is too serious to be suspected of Indifference, too plain and intelligible to be charged with Vanity, and too natural to be considered as pleading a Cause, of which he is not fully convinced himself, he will generally penetrate into the Hearts of his hearers; and, whether he sends them away with admiration of him or not, he may answer a higher end, in dismissing them thoughtful about themselves and their condition in the sight of God.

Indeed, in spite of all that has been done to discredit Religion, there is an attention still paid to Preaching, sufficient to demand and encourage our diligence in that part of duty. It is manifestly unworthy of a person

set apart for the study of the Scriptures, and the instruction of mankind from them, to rest wholly upon the labours of other men, and, for a little present ease, to give up the improvement himself would receive from offering advice of his own. The people naturally expect to hear something original from their Minister; and those absenter from Church, who plead that they can read a good sermon at home, have a better, though not a full Apology, if their Preacher has no instruction of his own to give them.

A Minister of the Gospel, who has a due sense of his Office, will be always prepared with sound Doctrine and well-considered Advice. Every natural and moral Event in the world will administer to the business of his Calling, in providing him with Pasture for his Flock. The different seasons of the year; the many striking instances of a general, or interpositions of a particular Providence; uncommon cases of Mortality, of Affliction, of Prosperity, supply him with abundant materials

materials for various and useful Discourses: He has, if he is disposed to walk in it, a spacious field for the exercise of his Soul in religious thoughts. The Sins and Follies surrounding him in the world, whilst they are incitements to a laudable zeal, spare him the trouble of much invention, in offering perpetual matter for Exhortation and Admonition.

But above all, the great Doctrines relating to our Salvation, which must be supposed familiar to him, cannot be inculcated too often. The discussion of them, in a controversial way, rather becomes the Press than the Pulpit, where Christian Truths should be taken for granted, and the consequences flowing from them be chiefly insisted on. Few Congregations hear the practical inferences from a religious doctrine with Languor; whereas most congregations grow weary and indifferent, when led into elaborate proofs of what they believe and understand, as well as

it can be understood, when simply proposed.

This leads me to a subject which merits all the stress that can be laid upon it. We are appointed Public Teachers, and never answer that destination more to the satisfaction of the world, as well as of our Consciences, than when we instruct the most Ignorant. If their Ignorance be innocent, it is a pleasant work to remove it; and, if the knowledge we can give them be more beneficial than any other, we may, without Vanity, assert the honour of being appointed to an Office of very high Importance. Now this Claim of ours is never so indisputable, as when we are active in the duty of catechising Children.

I am authorised to recommend, most earnestly, the frequent practice of it. If my authority were only Rubrical, it would deserve regard from all who have subscribed to the Liturgy. Were the practice only Custom,

Custom, the generality of it in all Christian Churches would ground a Presumption of its Expediency. But our Church hath not left it to any less obligation, than that of a positive Law. In the fifty-ninth Canon we find it prescribed under penalties, which I shall not recite, apprehending the bare prescriptive part sufficient to answer a good end in this Diocese.

The direction of the Canon is, “*Every Parson, Vicar or Curate, upon every Sunday and Holiday, before evening prayer, shall, for half an hour or more, examine and instruct the youth and ignorant part of his Parish, in the ten commandments, the Articles of the Belief, and the Lord’s Prayer, and shall diligently instruct and teach them in the Catechism set forth in the book of Common Prayer.*”

Here is a very circumstantial direction for performing this duty, every Sunday and
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Holiday,—before evening Prayer,—during the space of half an hour.

I am not authorised to suggest Excuses for any neglect of this Canon, and rather wish, that the full observation of it were more practicable and general; yet, in order to obtain a more frequent practice of it than is observable, it may be worth considering, what weight or plausibility there is in any plea that can be alleged for a departure from the Rigour of this law.

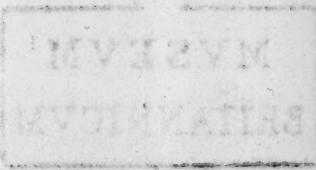
The Clergy, those I mean, who serve more than one Church, may plead partly the want of time, and partly the fatigue of a full employment of the day. The Congregation may be impatient during the Severities of Winter. The Minister may think, that the attention will be closer, and the impression stronger, in a less frequent performance of the duty, as words are apt to lose much of their force by constant repetition. They may farther allege, that the principles and practice of

of our Religion were ill understood before the Reformation, and that it required a Century perhaps of constant instruction, of this sort, to give the people intire possession of this valuable knowledge; but that we, who live after so much has been done, may safely somewhat relax our assiduity, with respect to the Elements of Religion, and turn our thoughts more to the stronger nourishment, which it likewise is our duty to provide for Adults, and others further advanced in life.

These are the best Excuses. Let us next consider the general Practice. I fear, we shall find it, in too many cases, out of the reach of these excuses.

It may be divided into three Classes. The first consists of those Parishes, where the Children are catechized during the summer months, perhaps near half the year; the second of those, in which this useful work is confined to the six Sundays in Lent; and the

third



third of those, in which it is not attended to at all.

Now though the first of these falls short of the Canon by one half of its direction, yet it must be confessed, that there is weight in the plea of the Minister's being under the necessity of serving more than one Church, and of the unwillingness of a congregation to be detained longer than the common service in the winter, as well as in the expediency of leaving an interval, which may bring the children back to the instruction with some improvement of their Capacity, and give the Minister more time for that, which he has to provide for their Parents. They, therefore, who go so far towards the obedience due to the Canon, as to catechise one half of the year, deserve commendation and thanks from their Parishioners, rather than their censure.

They who confine this part of their duty to the Sundays in Lent, may mean to keep

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up a regard to the Season dedicated by our Church to a recollection of our religious Obligations. The motive is doubtless serious, but it will not satisfy the Questions, whether the season of Lent be sufficient for the purpose? Whether the Children are so very desirous and susceptible of this knowledge, as to apprehend and retain it, after a mere formal anniversary repetition of six days, or rather of six half hours? Whether so small a space of time, as is hardly sufficient for the acquisition of any useful knowledge whatever, will suffice to root Christian Faith and Practice deeply enough in the mind of a Child, to arm him against the temptations of the World, the Flesh and the Devil, which will certainly beset him? And what prospect a Minister of the Gospel, intrusted by God and Man with the care of transmitting Christian Faith and Practice to a succeeding generation within his sphere, can form to himself, that his Trust will descend intire through the hands of persons so little instructed?

Parents

Parents are sometimes negligent in preparing and sending their children, and some may not condescend to exhibit them along with their inferior Fellow Christians. This is a discouragement much to be lamented, but it is not a general grievance; and if only the children of the Poor were to attend, they are committed to the care of the Minister equally with the rest, and, in a public view, their numbers compensate for the consequence they miss of by their birth, considering how much of general Comfort and Safety depends upon their good principles. So that the best motives, religious and civil, for propagating Christianity, apply as properly to that as to any part of life.

Some worthy Clergymen are so sensible of this, as even to exceed the half hour prescribed by the Canon, in reading an Exposition, either printed or prepared by themselves. They are doubtless laudably employed either way: But possibly, an unpremeditated explanation, arising from the manner, in which

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the answers are repeated, may have more effect and be better remembered. It may besides prove a happy opportunity of making a lasting impression, by lifting up the minds of the Children, in other parts, from the Sound to the Meaning of the words.

If the younger part of our Brethren should acquire by this means a facility of speaking professionally, it would be a valuable acquisition to their Ministry throughout life. The bad use made of religious language in former times should not totally discountenance it. But this fatal Extreme has been observed in other Protestant Countries, and occasioned some years ago the erection of a Society, in a foreign University under the dominion of our Sovereign, for the purpose of exercising Candidates for the Ministry in the language proper for the exigencies of their Office, either in admonishing or comforting, inciting or dissuading, instilling good or eradicating bad principles; and the Society was established by a Royal Charter, the preamble to which

ounds it in the importance and necessity of the Ministerial Office to the well-being of mankind. I mention it merely to shew, that the expediency of habituating ourselves to professional language, out of the prescribed Forms of our duty, is not a new observation, and that an unpremeditated instruction of our own, intermixed with the questions of the Catechism, if it be only a sentence or two occasionally, might supply the want of so very useful an institution among us.

I am at a loss what to say of the Ministers of those Parishes, where the people are strangers to any catechetical instruction. The most candid account to be suggested is, the Non-residence of the Ministers; an evil, arising chiefly from the known insufficiency of their Maintenance. Before the Reformation, great part of this evil arose from the interest the Court of Rome had in dispensing with Residence. When that power was abolished in this country, the happy change was attended with the new evil of alienating much

much of their original provision from the Parochial Clergy, which had been misapplied; and thus it became necessary, in this reformed Church, to continue Pluralities and Non-Residence.

I am not disposed to complain of any *legal* Indulgence or Exemption, but must lament, that they have produced instances of Non-Residence, which are neither *legally* nor *reasonably* supported, and may in time become matter of public animadversion, the impropriety of it being obvious, and the mischiefs arising from it, in some cases, great and manifold; the Church, the House of Residence, the Religion of the Parishioners, and the income of the Successor being all grievously affected. It would be wisdom in those, whom this observation concerns, and much to their Credit, to obviate new Regulations, by removing the cause of the complaint.

A resident Curate seems to remove it, but that can only avail the Incumbent, who resides upon another Benefice, or is elsewhere laudably or Clerically employed. When a Spiritual Income is converted into a mere Estate, a considerable part of the work, to which it is appropriated, must be withdrawn, however worthily a Curate may supply the absence of his Principal; and if those Incumbents, who are not exempted from Residence, should avowedly consider a resident Curate as a full dispensation from it, they will in time occasion a prevailing opinion, that the spiritual benefit, received by the Parishioners, is worth no more, than such Ministers pay to their Curates.

But some of this sort of Non-Residents have not even that excuse to plead; and if a Parish be destitute both of its proper Pastor and his Curate, it exhibits to us an image of the effects of a desolating Persecution, and will fill a serious mind with gloomy Prospects, till he compares the case with that of more happy

happy Parishes, whose Ministers reside, and, considering their relation to their flocks, keep up a constant intercourse, both friendly and religious, with them, and particularly treat their Children, in point of instruction, as if they were their own, whose future state they must be supposed to have at heart.

If Non-Residence be not the cause, in any instance, of a total omission of this duty, I can assign no other, that will leave it in any degree excusable. Engagements of Pleasure cannot be pleaded, without a defiance of religious Obligations; and though business may be a more admissible plea, yet it must be very indispensable, to outweigh so pressing a call upon a Parish Priest, as that, to which he is obliged to attend, by the design of his Office, by his Ordination Vows, and by his general Duty to God and Man. Even literary pursuits, reputable and beneficial as they are, will not be alleged by a learned Incumbent, as an excuse for neglecting the spiritual

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wants of the most ignorant Souls, committed to his Care.

Before we leave this subject, let us recapitulate it in two or three plain Propositions, which may serve to impress what has been offered.

It is one great End of the Establishment of a national Church to secure the Instruction of the Ignorant, that they may become innocent and useful upon Principles of Religion, as being stronger motives in the mind possessing them, than the Directions or Penalties of human Laws.

Children are the most ignorant part of mankind every where, and will, if quite neglected, be left to the Examples before them, which are seldom good, or to the direction of public Laws, with which they are not acquainted, or to the Penalties of Law, which are not powerful enough to deter a mind, trained up without the Fear of God, and

and a Knowledge of his Will, his Mercies and his Terrors, from becoming a Nuisance to the Community.

The Inference is obvious, that those Parish Priests go farthest towards promoting the Ends of a Church Establishment, who are most diligent in CATECHETICAL Instruction.

I have offered to your consideration, my Reverend Brethren, matters in which you are not all equally concerned. Many of you may be already habituated to the Diligence you would wish to see revived. But it is most probable, that they, to whom what hath been said may not be personally of use, will hear it with patience for the sake of their younger, or their less diligent Brethren.

It is never out of Season, at Solemnities like this, to review the Business of our Calling, and it is particularly in season at a time, when our national Church is remarkably favoured and protected by a most

Religious and Gracious KING; and when the Legislature has recently discountenanced Designs, which appeared to them to affect the Security of our Church Establishment.

We may, without the least ill will towards the Christian Parties who live in a state of Separation from us, embrace these additional motives to recollect and pursue the great Ends for which we are established.

The primitive Teachers of Christianity had no such Encouragements. They had many violent Prejudices to combat, and much cruel Oppression to endure; and yet the Christian Religion gained Strength, and in time Establishment, by their unwearied Perseverance. We have no obstacles to surmount in the discharge of our Duty, but such as will generally yield to a prudent zeal and a CHRISTIAN Character; and, instead of suffering as they did, we are countenanced and protected in our Persons and Property.

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If Peace and Prosperity, those Corrupters of the human heart, should ever so enervate the zeal of the Ministers of CHRIST, as to render them indifferent to HIM and His Cause, the Church will then be truly in Danger.

Let us deprecate so fatal a Disgrace, beseeching Almighty God most earnestly, in the plain and comprehensive words of our Liturgy, that all they, who are ordained to any Holy Function, may, both in their Life and Doctrine, set forth the Glory of GOD, and set forward the Salvation of all men, through JESUS CHRIST our Lord!

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